by Kevin Savetz

Easy CD-DA Extractor 4.6.9

Easy CD-DA Extractor rips CDs, converts files between audio formats, and burns files to CD, but Extractor probably won't revolutionize your digital audio collection.

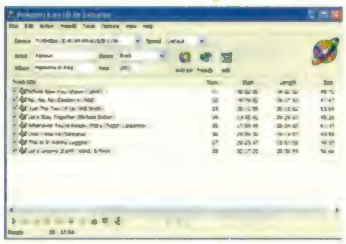
The application can encode music in a variety of popular and lesser-known formats, including MP3, Ogg Vorbis, and several flavors of WAV, AIFF, TwinVQ, and Monkey's Audio.

I ripped several CDs to create MP3s and other audio files, with the resulting sound quality being fine. For MP3s, Extractor lets you choose Faster or Higher quality encoding from 8Kbps to 320Kbps, including variable bit-rate encoding. But some files that Extractor created confused Windows Media Player into believing the total length was less than a minute, even though Media Player was able to play the entire 4-minute song.

Easy CD-DA Extractor is compatible with the freedb database and includes the ability to submit disc information to freedb. You can also play CDs directly from Extractor, but I had mixed results. The program became so unresponsive on WinXP when playing a track I could barely make it switch tracks. Pressing the Stop button inexplicably locked up the program. I had no such problems using Extractor with Win2000.

The package also includes Easy Audio File Converter, an efficient tool for converting audio files between formats via a drag-and-drop interface. There's also Easy Audio CD Creator for burning audio CDs from MP3 and WAV files. Creator is decidedly lacking in frills; it will create audio CDs but can't burn data-only MP3 CDs.

If you get stuck, you'll be glad to have trial and error on your side because the online help consists of only a few terse Web pages of limited troubleshooting information and unhelpful descriptions of obvious functions. Tech support didn't respond to our queries. Easy CD-DA Extractor has potential, but it's unreliable and its features are limited compared with other audio tools. ▲



Easy CD-DA Extractor 4.6.9
Shareware; $24.95
Jukka Poikolainen
www.poikosoft.com

Fanix Software As-U-Type 1.2

Your word processor has a spell checker, naturally. But that doesn't do you much good when you're writing an e-mail message, posting to a message board, or composing a flame in your Usenet client. As-U-Type will improve your spelling no matter the applications you're using.

The program watches keystrokes as you type, immediately correcting any typing mistakes. Real-time spell checkers aren't new, but As-U-Type is highly customizable, yet practically invisible and doesn't interrupt your work.

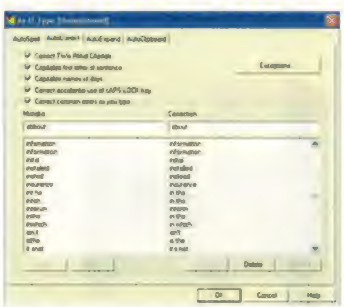
If you make a mistake, such as typing "does't" instead of "doesn't," As-U-Type silently corrects the error. If it has no clue what you meant, it politely beeps, although its guesses are usually accurate. If it misses, As-U-Type learns from its mistake. For instance, if your fumbling fingers type "peaker," the program changes it to "leaker." But you really meant "speaker," so you press BACKSPACE and type it correctly. The next time you type "peaker," As-U-Type changes the typo to "speaker."

The AutoExpand function is a logical follow-up, letting you define macros to be expanded as you type. For example, when you type "thpb," the program can replace that with "thrombophlebitis." This is convenient when pasting lengthy boilerplate text into e-mail messages and other correspondence. Macros can include the current date, time, and special characters, such as arrow keys.

As-U-Type also includes 10 distinct clipboards, but unlike Windows' standard clipboard, these are limited to storing only text. The QuickPad feature is handy for filling out online forms. It displays boilerplate text you define, pasting that text into the appropriate spot in another application with a double-click.

As-U-Type isn't infallible. In some circumstances, you can fool it into missing a misspelled word, so keep your old spell checker around for important documents. However, if your typing or spelling abilities are less than perfect, this little utility can squash embarrassing errors before anyone else sees them.

The program works with all versions of Windows since 95, but it isn't compatible with DOS applications or Microsoft Word's AutoCorrect Wizard. ▲



As-U-Type
$29.95
Fanix Software
www.asutype.com

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect